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at the beginning of a young person's career may mean an irretrievable injury, if not the ruin of his education.

On the whole, it seems that the supervisory work of a principal of a large high school, if properly and faithfully done, is quite necessary to the success of the institution.

J. G. Allen.

Rochester Free Academy.

THE BINGHAMTON CONFERENCE.

A meeting of principals of secondary schools was held at Binghamton, 24 and 25 February, to confer upon work in English. The purpose was to listen to collegiate complaints, to learn the current methods of the best schools represented at the conference, carefully to examine the submitted specimens of literary expression, and to devise means for remedying apparent defects. Friday evening was given to a round-table consideration of the abnormalities of Freshman English.

Professor J. M. Hart, of the English department of Cornell University: Though I speak primarily for Cornell, I know that this lack of adequate expression is a serious matter for all. Every parent may justly demand that his child, graduating from an academy at the age of eighteen and one-half years, shall possess ability to express his thoughts in words; that these shall be selected with regard to accepted usage, shall be correctly spelled and syntactically arranged into complete sentences; and that these statements shall be properly grouped in a whole-souled paragraph. This is what we require. It has been charged that Cornell asks for the facility of a city reporter; but I protest against such a misconception. Our demands are fair and will sooner or later be met. Every candidate for admission to the University should be able so to express himself that an ordinary reader can take in his thought without effort.

The evil of which we complain is deep and wide-spread. One of our instructors in physics tells me that his Seniors, however precise in experimental work, are apparently unable so to relate processes and conclusions that he can ascertain the meaning. He finds himself compelled to reconstruct the psychology of every

writer. In one instance a Senior presented a thesis of fifteen hundred words in chemistry but could not, until after persistent questioning, tell what he meant by speaking of himself as "a promising young chemist." He had used the phrase in the sense of "one who promised to do his best." Nor is this wholly exceptional. Senior writers of the worst English are now, with increasing rigor, being detained for a year's course in their mother tongue.

The colleges do not expect writers. No school can impart the literary touch. It is a gift. There can, however, be acquired the simple technique whereby an academic graduate shall be able to express with his pen the thoughts of his mind. If this is not true, for what purpose do the schools exist? There can be no education without power to express. And in this statement I am sustained by the philosophical President of Cornell University.

I am aware that the teaching of English fails of complete and precise results because of contamination through daily contact with slang and bad grammar outside the class-room. Instructors in Latin and Greek have here an advantage. However dull their pupils, the language taught them remains uncorrupted. Badness of speech is in the air, and the combined effort of the school is needed to neutralize it. All school work should be English work, whether the study be Latin or geography. Wherever the subject matter is well learned the daily lessons afford the best foundation for practice in written expression.

Cornell feels obliged to require of schools not under the Regents substantially the same preparatory reading as that called for by the New England Association of Colleges. The subject matter should be fully interpreted by the teacher and thoroughly discussed with the pupil. Then the student will be prepared to write his own views. It is preposterous to compel a student to write on a topic concerning which the teacher has awakened or encouraged no ideas. To interpret is the teacher's business. Our schools teach "humanity," and the reading prescribed has, or should have, a humanizing tendency. As long as any production is intensely human, so long is it a classic. Too much attention is given to mere dexterity of intellect. This faculty should undoubtedly be sharpened, but the sympathies should correspondingly be broadened. I do not underrate the value of Latin and Greek. Their glory will not fade. Yet the early study of

these languages is a continuous grind. It is not literary training. Not one pupil in a thousand emerges from the daily penumbra of mood and tense. In reading good English the pupil walks in light, surrounded by inviting pleasures. Here sympathy appeals to sympathy, and life to life. We have taught the child to solve problems until existence itself seems to him one endless conundrum. Here, in our English prose and poetry, is a world of mighty souls that utter truths intelligible to young and old alike. Daily is the initiation of our pupils into this commonwealth of the spirit becoming more and more a necessity. A course of thoughtful reading under competent guidance will clear away many obstacles over which we now stumble. If we can bring these material lives into contact with this life spiritual, original thought will find good form. The object of English work lies here.

Professor James A. Truax, of Union University : The tests at Union are based on the supposition that secondary schools give instruction in grammar, rhetoric and some portion of English literature. We ask that candidates show grammatical correctness and ability to express their thoughts in idiomatic English. We receive false syntax, almost no punctuation, and no paragraphs depending on coherence of thought. Applicants for admission may have the philosophy of rhetoric, they certainly have not the art. There is need of more individual training in modes of expression. Colleges themselves are largely responsible for the evil. Only recently have they sent out competent teachers of our language. Much may be expected, too, from a live public sentiment, though this is of recent and slow growth. Even among the graduates of the technical departments it has been commonly thought that a civil engineer needed not the art of expression. I think good results are obtained from extemporaneous work, not too formal, on a subject previously announced. This production should be corrected until it can be unhesitatingly placed in the hands of a compositor. With a literature as rich and varied as ours, neglect here is absurd.

Principal W. P. Thompson, Auburn High School : It is exceedingly difficult to get the average student interested in English, as science calls more and more loudly. That way money lies.

Principal D. O. Barto, Ithaca High School : The colleges are

largely responsible for Freshman English. Rigid requirements have been maintained in Latin, Greek and Mathematics ; and the secondary schools prepared pupils to meet them. Until recently but slight demands have been made in English, and the schools shaped their work accordingly.

Mr. J. Russell Parsons, Jr., Director of examinations, Regents' Office, Albany : It is interesting in this connection to note the rapid increase in the number of English composition papers forwarded to our office. During the four years from 1888 to 1892 the number of papers allowed increased more than one hundred per cent. This was in spite of higher demands and more severe scrutiny. In literature the number rose from 954 to 2207 ; and in courses in English reading, during two years only, from 285 to 1005. The totals of all English work show that during the last four years the amount of effort indicated by Regents' papers has been doubled.

Principal C. O. Dewey, Binghamton High School : Not long since, in filling out a student's certificate for admission to Cornell, I expressly stated that the candidate's work had been unsatisfactory. He was promptly admitted to the university.

Principal Barto : Colleges should admit to their entrance examinations only those students who are recommended therefor by their teachers. If all who wish are allowed to enter, no school should be held responsible for a pupil whom it has not fully commended.

Professor Hart : I cannot promise that Cornell would hold itself bound to rule a candidate out of an examination on a principal's request ; but you have a right to ask it. There should certainly be some provisional scrutiny. If we know that a candidate has run away from school, we can make his examination more searching. The test in English will consume three hours. During the first hour answers will be given to questions on the contents of one-half the books assigned for reading. The remaining time will be devoted to the preparation of three papers on topics taken from the remaining books on the list.

Of the methods of teaching English in secondary schools presented for discussion on Friday morning, space can be given for only one. Miss Myra L. Spaulding, in charge of English composition at the Binghamton High School, plans the work as follows : Each of the four grades is subdivided into sections num-

bering about thirty pupils. Every section has a weekly recitation in rhetoric. During the first year special drill is given in the use of capitals, punctuation marks, and in the correct pronunciation of troublesome words. In the second year diction and style receive due attention. The word-exercise comprises a study of terms having like forms but different uses. The third year pupils are exercised in the handling of figurative language and in correct paragraphing. The word-study is directed to the origin and determination of terms. The fourth year reviews previous lessons and adds a study of synonyms.

The written work of the first year is confined to the divers epistolary forms. Acute perception is encouraged by sending pupils to write up such matters as the show window of an art store, the best patterns of carpets, or some bonnets at the milliner's. Not more than three are sent to one spot. They are enjoined to ask for information if necessary. By this practice individual tastes soon appear, and thereafter agreeable work can readily be assigned. Not less than ten of these productions are written by each during the year. The practice of the second grade is on description and narration. Such subjects as a certain deserted house, a specified rock, or a tree, are assigned. The pupil is to take tablet and pencil with him, go round about, examine closely, determine at what point he finds the most picturesque view, and there stand and describe the object as it appears. Description of interiors is similarly made. Landscapes afford endless variety. Narrative work is confined chiefly to reproduction of interesting legends. During this year from eight to ten compositions of 200 words each are required. The writing of the third year is on argumentative and expository themes. Books of reference are named and the precise pages indicated. From six to eight essays of not less than 600 words are written by each pupil. During the fourth year the same number of articles is exacted, but the productions are of greater length and on more diversified subjects. All written work is sharply criticised. Errors are illuminated; and they must be corrected in the presence of the teacher. Face to face work secures the most lasting impressions. The pupil is made to learn that painting, whether in words or in colors, demands the eye of an artist.

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